

FITZORIA an EXTRACT from Tambimuttu's Memoirs LIVING IS A MULTI-STORIED THING or PEOPLE, Why Don't You Take Your Clothes Off?

Notes for Fitzoria

or

The Story of How
I transcended my
Sorrows and
Myself and
Came to know
What I Truly Was

by

Tambimuttu, Himself
editor of Poetry London
to erase all false
myths about himself

London

10 days before Christmas Day
1974

was told 2 months ago in New York over the telephone by my 12 year old daughter, Shakuntala, (I had named her after Kalidasa's greatest play, Shakuntala, which I had discovered in a sunburst of wonder and surprise in a friend's flat, one war-time hang-dog morning; and Lawrence Binyon said in his introduction that Goethe had thought Kalidasa, having the many-storied earth and the heavens for his stage and the whole Nature Herself, man, fawns, the vines and creepers, the moon and Heaven and Earth and Gods for his protagonists painted a more vast canvas than Shakespeare, whence he is the better dramatist according to Goethe, - I was taught differently at school - which the you of today will find a 'cool' statement to make, whereas it may have been unthinkable in the Objective Reporting of my London of the 'Thirties and 'Forties:

Would'st thou the young years blossoms and the fruits of
its decline and all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured,
feasted, fed, Would'st thou the Earth and Heaven
itself in one sole Name combine I name thee, O Shakuntala!
and all at once is said.

Goethe, Tr. by Rabindranath Tagore)

"Daddy, I want to know more about the Tambimuttus."

She had been separated from me from the age of 8 months and, although I see her once at least on my annual trips to the States (we belong to 2 different states: I am a New Yorker, and she lives in Massachusetts), she has had to depend on distorted hearsay and circus-clown rumour-- with the J. MacLaren Ross' tragic Pagliacci figure looming in the ante-room of my mind, of those days, in the 'ol Wheat she in Rathbone Place, carrying his stick with the well-polished silver knob beating the blues of blackouts and poverty with his ~~nift, shaggy, identifi~~ nift, shaggy, identifi ~~knitting~~ knitting, miniscule script, and the plots for most stories provided for him by a plottopedia, an enormous tome called Plotto, which Julian told me as one Fitzoria to another capsuled every possible type of plot and variations one could think of-- and our infrequent correspondence to go

to know me, whence, I think, Shakuntala's request. Impressed not only by her speech but also her growth, I told a friend of mine about it whose only reaction was "We are all Americans and we are all searching for our roots all the time. But I don't think it was like that with my daughter who had seen her professor stepfather hand me over books from his furniture-moving, sweeping library in which there were some pretty funny things written about me like silly Michael Meyer's opening sentence in the World of George Orwell edited by Miriam Gross: "I first met George Orwell though that odd character Tambimuttu, the Singhalese editor of Poetry London. I had expressed admiration of Orwell's work, and Tambimuttu said 'Would you like to meet him? I'll tell him you'll be writing to him.'" Even more than most of Tambi's promises, this seemed unlikely to bear fruit," I have never made any promises to Michael who I knew very little being a friend of his elder brother Dick, who is a doctor with a fetching limp and Michael, the red-headed little boy who I heard had gone to Oxford, was editing Sidney Keyes' poems (surprise, so Dick's brother was going library) and then teaching in Stockholm, I think. Yes, it's a sweeping, colourful entrance, Michael (you must have had a lot of trouble figuring that one out) but you don't have to carry on the "Literary" stunt just because somewhere along the academic racket you landed the job of editing Sidney's poems from the late Sir Herbert Read, and Routledge's and you don't have to be dramatic and brilliant all the bloomin' time: what my daughter meant I think was defend yourself, break your monastic silence and indifference to the quirks and traits of others, WRITE both for you and for me.

Well, Shakuntala, when you were one or two I wrote an autobiographical children's story called Catching an Elephant, a mantram a sound boom I got from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and sound it in a beautiful red, flowered Indian textile for you. If you've still got that could you send me a copy to help me recapture the flavour of my growing up in Ceylon while I paint for you on a large canvas with broad strokes in which time is one long beginningless and endless stretch, a long white endless note- I am like a little boy with a million pots of paint around me, who when he puts out his finger-painting hands like magnets to pick up the hard iron filings of events and facts of his dervish being (put yourself in the centre of the dance, Man) here, before and after, they adhere to him in a big bunches, in a million colours in which there is no differentiation, and during ~~the~~ first period in England, January 1939 to December 1949, my critics could not understand a "tambi-ism" like that. Great variety leads to sameness, just as I said in my First Letter in Poetry London: "Each poet is a leaf, a significant leaf, of poetry, the multifoliate tree, "which" apophthgm, to use Anthony Thwaite's pin-stripes officialese is a "vapid or inflated" whereas Lawrence Durrell has quoted it often in his writing including his "Tambimuttu beating his big Ceylonese drum in London," which sounds O.K. to me because it is a FACT, repeating the same truism over and over again and, because life is cyclic having completed the circle, I have returned to London to repeat the gyrations again with POETRY LONDON NEW SERIES, another circle, from my new office in Bloomsbury Way, a stone's throw away from my first real office in Craven House, Kingsway where Kathleen Raine used to work with me. I am glad since it short-circuits the publication of Poetry London-Ceylon-Bombay-New York to Nowhere a non-circle which would be against the laws of Nature and I was pleased to see new circles, pretty rings of brightness floating in the landscape to dispel ordinaryness as I had advised everybody to strive for in my poetry magazine! In my time we only had Poetry Ireland, Poetry New York, and Poetry Scotland

which was dedicated to me since "I was discriminating artist and frien of so many of the Scottish poets along with the only art magazine of t period beside the commercial ones, Counterpoint, also handsomely dedi- cated to me from Oxford by Conrad Senat, chiefly because I had be- friended the impecunious artist "Wild Gerald" (Gerald Wilde) whom I am supposed to have locked up daily upstairs in my duplex in Gloucester Walk, Kensington High Street, until he produced some paintings which is fair enough--although I never locked up Gerlad--since that's what he was there for, at his own request. J. MacLaren-Ross has telescoped two different situations I described to him into one. The first was Gerald's. I left him half a crown a day for lunch in the hope he would lunch downstairs in Esther's night-club and cafe and not sneak out to the pubs before I returned from the office and accompanied on our nightly pubcrawls by which time I hoped he would have some painting ready to take to Sir Kenneth Clark, Peter Watson, Eric Gregory and oth friends and very often I was not disappointed. The only trouble was that when Gerald sold some paintings, the money vanished overnight in some disaster, or accident, or he simply threw it away. Gerald needed looking after and having things arranged for. There was the day I sent him to show the present Lord Clark a selection of the weeks works Lord Clark paid him £100, the highest I have known him to get from anybody at any one time. Gerald promptly called on Erika and Stewart Scott who had been lent Julian Trevelyan's studio at Durham Wharf, Hammersmith. They had a jolly old carouse at The Black Horse (Julian's and Sir A.P. Herbert's stamping ground) and The Swan and after dinner Gerald disappeared into the blackout. Next morning Stew found him fast asleep in the square walled garden on the Thames where Julian and his first wife Ursula Darwin Trevelyan, granddaughter of Charles, had their famous Boat Race parties. What remained of Gerald's £100 was in every nook and cranny scattered by the high wind. Stew and I kept Julian supplied with all news of Gerald exploits, but, in this instance, he has telephoned Gerald's artistic high state into that of a painter-poet friend of mine called Margaret Hurd.

The night before Larry Durrell sailed for Greece I had introduced her to him. "Get her to keep her hand at it, Larry.", I told him, "get her to paint or to write." They have talked of setting off to Greece together and soon I heard rumours that Larry locked her up daily in a room without lunch or supper until she produced a poem or a painting. This was duly noted by the short-story writer, who has most generously ascribed to me in his book what Larry should be credited with. But more of this later.

When I was living in New York I heard of Poetry Bristol, Poetry Manchester, Poetry Alaska, Poetry North Western (from Northwestern University) and, on my return to London within minutes of my arrival, of Poetry Wales and Poetry St. Ives in Bernard Stone's Bookshop, in Kensington Church Walk. Sir John Waller wished me off to meet Bernard, Edward Lucie-Smith and the Liverpuddlian poets and Adrian Henri, Brian Patten among them in his house of a car, a Commer Auto-Sleeper Johnny had gotten from Wilson's of Brixton, with his rubicund secretary-housekeeper-chauffeur, Michael Ford, chauffeuring and I shaving with the car's electric razor. Kensington Church Walk is eight feet wide and Johnny insisted on the car being driven right up to Bernard's shopfront where it caused a great commotion.

By asking to see the Man Behind the Iron Mask, Shakuntala was only applying more thumb-screws on me since I was embarrassed I was already in bondage. Before I left London, Ann Barr, pretty and clever lady at Harper's and Queen had me in chains already, part-financing my American trip with an advance for an article she might never get. She had made a shrewd guess of my character, I suppose. Her generosity (as in the case of T.S. Eliot for whom I published a 60th Birth-

day book- I added the name of my new partner Richard March as a co-editor to encourage him in his literary career, other notorious example fo my generosity, since he had given my English wife, Jacqueline Stanley, £10 to buy a new clothes with, after I had torn up all mine and put up her hats which I buried in my Marchmont Street garden near Russel Square) fired what Anthony Thwaite calls my "manic generosity" and I am going to ~~give~~ give Barr more than she bargained for her editorial scissors, rubbers and red pencil.